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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 001747

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: BJP EXPELS JASWANT SINGH -- INTERNAL STRIFE  
REACHES NEW PITCH

REF: A. NEW DELHI 1620

- [B.](#) NEW DELHI 1401
- [C.](#) NEW DELHI 1319
- [D.](#) NEW DELHI 1285
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- [F.](#) NEW DELHI 1226
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[11.](#) (SBU) Summary: Former Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh became the latest victim of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) infighting on August 19 when the party expelled him for his favorable depiction of Pakistani founder Mohammad Ali Jinnah in his latest book. The decision to oust Jaswant Singh occurred on the opening morning of an important three-day party meeting. It came only a few days after the party decided to remove former Rajasthan Chief Minister Vasudhara Raje from a leadership position in the state. Yet, for BJP-watchers, the most important event this week has been a TV interview in which the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief called for a generational change in the BJP, signaling a more active RSS role in rebuilding the BJP after its crushing defeat in the 2009 elections. The problem for the RSS is that none of Delhi-based second tier leaders who qualify as the next generation have an RSS background. Those with an RSS grounding are in the states - Narendra Modi in Gujrat, Shivraj Chauhan in Madhya Pradesh. End Summary.

[12.](#) (U) Internal struggles within the BJP reached a new level of intensity today when BJP President Rajnath Singh announced the expulsion of former Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh from primary membership in the party for his positive portrayal of Pakistan founder Mohammad Ali Jinnah in his book: "Jinnah - India, Partition, Independence." The dismissal came on the opening day of the BJP's three-day "Introspection Meeting" in Shimla, called to discuss the causes of and response to the party's trouncing in the 2009 parliamentary elections. Jaswant Singh's latest book, released a few days ago, has attracted much media attention for its kind words for Jinnah ("a great man") and its not so flattering assessment of Congress Party stalwarts Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Patel for acceding to demands for the division of the country in [1947](#).

¶3. (U) The decision to oust Jaswant Singh took place at a heated meeting of the BJP's Parliamentary Board at the first sitting of the Shimla meetings. Rajnath Singh had earlier disassociated the party from Singh's book, saying that it did not represent the party's view because: "The important role of M.A. Jinnah in the division of India, which led to dislocation and destabilization of millions of people, is well known. We cannot wish away this painful part of our history." Other BJP officials had also distanced themselves quickly from Jaswant, aware that partition and Jinnah are emotional issues within the party and its RSS base. L.K. Advani had been pushed out of the party presidency in 2005 after he made positive statements about Jinnah during a visit to Pakistan.

¶4. (U) Jaswant Singh responded by saying he was saddened at the action of the party of which he was a founding member and one that he had served faithfully and with dedication for 30 years. He told the press that BJP President Rajnath Singh had informed him of the decision over the phone. He said he was pained that BJP leaders Rajnath Singh and L.K. Advani had not shown him the courtesy of conveying the decision to in person rather than over the phone. Jaswant said he was especially aggrieved at the reason for his expulsion: "the day we start questioning thought and writing and reading will be the day we begin to enter a dark alley."

¶5. (U) BJP leader Balbir Punj agreed with most analysts who felt that censure of Jaswant Singh was inevitable after the book's content began to make its way into the press. Punj

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underlined the long-held and firm position of the party that primary responsibility for partition lay with Jinnah-led Muslims and the British. In his view, it is unacceptable to the party that one of its leaders would question this canon by exonerating Jinnah and shifting the blame to Nehru and Patel. According to Punj, the most that Nehru and Patel could be criticized for is not resisting Jinnah and the British more firmly on the question of the division of India.

¶6. (SBU) Jaswant's expulsion is only the latest in a continuous stream of BJP discord, dissent, recrimination and finger-pointing that has played out publicly since the election results were announced in May. However, the intensity of the dissonance has increased in the run-up to the Shimla meetings. Earlier this week, a heated public row broke out over the party's decision to remove former Rajasthan Chief Minister Vasundhra Raje as leader of the opposition in the state assembly. Raje refused to accept the order, claiming that a majority of the party's legislators in the state assembly supported her. To prove her point, she paraded these legislators in front of the media as they sought meetings with BJP leaders L.K. Advani and Rajnath Singh to press their case in favor of Raje.

¶7. (U) A meeting last week between Advani and RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat fueled excited speculation that the RSS had asked Advani to resign. The RSS had to issue a statement refuting the story but in a TV interview on August 18, Bhagwat told Times Now that the RSS believes the BJP needs a generational change and a new cohort of leaders in the 50-60 year age range. His assessment was that the BJP had been jolted by the election results and lost its balance. In his view, new leadership would help the party regain its legs.

Comment: RSS Cracks the Whip

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¶8. (SBU) The Bhagwat interview was surprising. It is quite unusual for the RSS leadership to lecture the BJP so directly and publicly about operational and leadership issues. The RSS has tried to maintain the public image that it is not a political organization and does not interfere in the decision-making and functioning of its political affiliate.

There was no such pretence in Bhagwat's words and manner as he lectured the BJP on TV on what it needed to do. RSS fingerprints also appear to be unmistakable in the banishing of Jaswant Singh and the sidelining of Raje. Neither of them has a RSS background and both had thumbed their nose at the RSS when in positions of authority. Their swift removal shows that it is much easier for the RSS to have its way with a weakened and convulsing BJP. It will not be surprising if more RSS-inspired decisions emanate from the Shimla conference over the next two days. The dilemma for the RSS in calling for generational change in the BJP is that none of the second tier of leaders in Delhi -- Arun Jaitley, Sushma Swaraj, Arun Shourie, Yashwant Sinha, Venkaiah Naidu -- have an RSS background and none are beholden to it. Those with RSS grounding are in the states - Narendra Modi in Gujrat, Shivraj Chauhan in Madhya Pradesh. End Comment.

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